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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet, prepared by the Southern Oregon Research and Development Committee (SORD), offers suggestions for students and teachers for improving students' test-taking skills. Among the skills that students should possess to be prepared for taking tests are knowing the purposes of testing, having experience and practice in testing and following directions, knowing the advantages of guessing, and being prepared. Seven suggestions for students to consider prior to taking tests cover such topics as studying, diet, exercise, and comfortable dress. Included in the 14 suggestions for students to follow during tests are hints concerning directions, time management, math problems, and reading tests. Twelve guidelines are offered for deductive reasoning during tests including eliminating incorrect options, examining questions for clues to the answer, reading questions first on a reading test, and making use of patterns in the test. Information provided for teachers includes a description of the problem of students who lack test-taking skills, a definition of test wiseness, suggestions for helping students become better test takers, and suggestions for maintaining a good testing environment. (DC)

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. . . STUDY . . . ESTIMATE . .
. GET ENOUGH REST . . . BE
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FOLLOW DIRECTIONS . . . BE
ACCURATE . . . DEDUCE . . .
ELIMINATE . . . BE POSITIVE . .
. KNOW THE "STEM" . . . READ
CAREFULLY . . . WORK QUICKLY .
. . DRESS APPROPRIATELY . . .
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A SQRD Project

TEST TAKING SKILLS

by Art Phillips

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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IDEAS FOR IMPROVING TEST TAKING SKILLS

STUDENTS SHOULD . . .

Clearly understand the purposes for testing.

Be experienced in using test materials, pencil, test booklet, and/or answer sheet.

Have experiences in following directions similar to those which will be used during the test.

Practice completing requested information, working in columns and rows, filling in responses, and asking for information.

Be aware of ways to make efficient use of time.

Know the advantages of guessing.

Recognize the need to read carefully.

Prepare for the testing process, both mentally and physically.

STUDENTS: BEFORE YOU TAKE A TEST . . .

Begin to get ready before the time the test is to be given. Develop a positive attitude toward taking the test.

If possible, study material that will be covered in the test. After you think you know the material, study it even more.

If you are taking a teacher made test, study previous exams and quizzes.

A good diet is important in making sure your body and mind are ready.

Plan to exercise regularly during the weeks preceding the test.

Get plenty of rest the evening before the test.

Dress comfortably--warmly, but with a "layered" effect.

WHEN YOU TAKE A TEST . . .

Read all written directions and listen to all verbal directions very carefully.

If you don't understand something, ask the

test examiner to explain.

Be sure you understand how to mark the answer sheet correctly, and check to see that you are marking in the appropriate space for every question.

Plan your time sequence so that you should be able to complete the test; do not spend too long a time on any one question.

Begin to work as soon as possible.

Have a piece of scratch paper available to check math problems.

Mark the answers on your booklet or answer sheet carefully, but as quickly as possible.

If you skip a question, mark it so you may later find it easily.

Skim the test to become familiar with the types of questions that are asked.

Read each question carefully; be certain you know what the question asks.

Answer as many questions as possible; make guesses or estimates on items you're unsure of. However, don't worry if you are unable to complete the entire test. You're not always expected to answer every question. If you usually have difficulty finishing a test, answer the short (or easy) questions first.

If you are taking a reading test, read the questions first. This will help you know what the paragraph is about.

In math problems, always estimate. (About how much should the answer be?) If you estimate before marking your answer, you may be able to eliminate several options.

Look over your test when you have finished to be certain you have read all the questions and aswered as many as possible.

DEDUCTIVE REASONING DURING THE TEST . . .

Eliminate options you know are incorrect. The more answers you eliminate as incorrect, the better chance you have of identifying the correct one.

Rapidly define the problem (question), analyze and evaluate the different possible solutions.

Watch for "key" words or terms, and look very closely for any qualifying conditions or

statements. Look for such words and phrases as "usually, commonly, in most instances, never, not one of these, always," etc.

Study the "stem" (the basic question or problem) as it will often give you a clue in deciding the correct answer. Look for matches between the stem and one of the options.

Watch for grammatical cues. If the last word in the stem is "an," you will know the answer must begin with a vowel.

Look at similar questions. They may provide clues.

In answering essay questions, watch for such words as "compare, contrast, discuss, evaluate, analyze, define, or describe," and develop your answer accordingly.

If you are taking a reading test which contains a long paragraph followed by several questions, read the questions first. This technique will help you identify important elements in the paragraph.

When using charts and graphs to answer a group of questions, first read the stem questions, identify the elements in the chart or graph relating to the stem, and then answer the questions.

Make use of patterns that may appear in a test (particularly a teacher-made test). For example, the longer statements may generally tend to be the correct answers.

Watch for overly qualified answers, as they are usually the correct choice. Also, correct answers are often placed in the same sequence--for example, the "A" choice may be correct in a number of questions listed closely together.

Try to determine the test writer's intent, but be careful not to make incorrect assumptions.

TEACHERS:

Research conducted during the last ten years indicates that many children are deficient in skills required to obtain valid test results. This deficiency prevents them from performing well on standardized and teacher-made tests. Such students are often unable to understand and implement direstions given during test administration, to deal with answer sheets without confusion, or to answer questions in an efficient and effective manner. Their resulting test scores are therefore not valid indicators of potential ability or achievement. Research indicates that "test wiseness" can be improved in students without using unethical practices.

"Test wiseness" is defined as the capacity to use the characteristics and formats of the test to receive a high score. "Test wiseness" is independent of the student's knowledge of the subject matter which the test is supposed to measure.

To profit from suggestions included in this flyer, students should be given frequent and specific help in applying concepts to classroom lessons. SORD hopes you'll incorporate these hints into daily work so test taking skills will be sharpened and students will become "test wise."

Encourage students to pace themselves; some students spend too much time on the first of the test or on the more difficult questions. Treat each test as a learning experience for students. For example, spend time teaching them how to mark answer sheets correctly, how to skim questions, answering easy ones first.

Be positive and enthusiastic with students when discussing the test taking process. See that the very best testing environment is provided: proper heat control, adequate ventilation, appropriate desk arrangement, and controlled noise level.

For additional suggestions in promoting "test wiseness," watch for another SORD project, Test Taking Skills: Incorporating Them Into the Curriculum. The pamphlet, also written by Art Phillips, Ashland, will be distributed to all school media centers.

For a bibliography of useful materials related to improving test taking skills, refer to the pamphlet, Test Taking Skills: Incorporating Them Into the Curriculum, by Art Phillips.

SORD, (Southern Oregon Research and Development Committee), is a program offered by Jackson Education Service District, Medford, Oregon.

Its members are local district teachers and administrators who meet once monthly to plan activities in four areas:

Student Enrichment

Professional Development

Research

Projects Review

A description of SORD's objectives, activities, and projects is available on request from Jackson ESD, 101 North Grape, Medford, OR, 97501. Phone (503)776-8578.

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